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Demonization Blueprints: Soviet Conspiracist Antizionism in Contemporary Left-Wing Discourse

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Abstract

Contemporary left-wing antizionist discourse reproduces with stunning fidelity some of the central tropes of Soviet antizionist propaganda, which demonized Israel and Zionism. The article explores the background of these tropes, looks at the biographies of the right-wing Soviet ideologues who developed them, and examines the mechanisms through which they reached the West. The article concludes that these tropes are inextricably linked to antisemitic conspiracy theory, containing seeds of anti-Jewish violence that we ignore at our own peril.

Keywords: antisemitism, antizionism, conspiracy theory, demonization, Durban, Israel, neo-Nazism, propaganda, Russia, socialism, Soviet Union, Zionism, Zionologists

The 2001 UN Conference against Racism at Durban offered a stark illustration of the ease with which progressive antizionism devolves into dehumanization of the Jews. In Durban, self-described anti-racists—including international NGOs Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International—stood by as Jewish participants were harassed and prevented from speaking. Booths displayed posters picturing Jews with hooked noses and bloodied hands, and ones equating Zionism with Nazism.[1] The *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* were distributed, along with flyers bearing Hitler's photo, captioned "What if I had won?"[2] The security situation deteriorated, threatening Jewish attendees' physical safety. What began with a demonization of Israel quickly turned into a demonization of "Jews of the entire world," who were portrayed as "accomplices of this evil regime." By the end of the conference, demonization became personal, as human rights activists "could no longer show their Jewish colleagues respect": their very Jewishness "shamed the antiracist cause."[3]

Durban may have been an extreme example of Jews being subjected to antisemitic demonization in an ostensibly left-wing space, but it wasn't an exception. Progressives cross the supposedly clear line they claim separates antizionism from antisemitism with distressing regularity. From the antisemitic scandal that destroyed the Women's March national organization;[4] to Jeremy Corbyn's Labour Party, which the UK's Equality and Human Rights Commission found guilty of antisemitism and "political interference in antisemitism complaints";[5] to Congresswoman Ilhan Omar suggesting that American Jews had dual loyalties[6] and bought political influence,[7] and that Israel "hypnotized" the world against seeing its "evil";[8] to a climate change group demanding that organizers of a Washington, DC voting rally remove Jewish groups from it because they were "Zionists";[9] to prominent Muslim American leader Zahra Biloo pronouncing the entirety of American Jewry—from the Anti-Defamation League to Hillel to "Zionist synagogues"—enemies of American Muslims:[10] instances of

progressive antisemitism have become the mainstay of Jewish experience in the United States, Britain, and elsewhere in the West.

If the line separating antizionism and antisemitism is as clear as the left insists, why do some of its most prominent activists, politicians, and intellectuals cross it so frequently?

In this article I argue that they do so because the form of antizionism they choose to engage is, in fact, grounded in antisemitic conspiracy theory. Despite the fact that non-antisemitic criticism of Israel and Zionism is possible, and countless people, including Israelis and the Jewish diaspora, engage in it daily, parts of the left which are becoming increasingly influential have opted for a worldview, explanatory logic, and rhetorical devices that are not just similar to but rooted in the deadly tropes of the antisemitic theories of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* and Nazi theory. It is a style of antizionism that was formulated and infused into the global hard-left discourse by the USSR through a massive international propaganda campaign, which it ran between 1967 and approximately 1988.[11]

That campaign presented Zionism in demonizing, conspiracist terms and associated Israel with all of humanity's greatest evils such as racism, settler colonialism, imperialism, fascism, Nazism, and apartheid. It asserted that Zionists controlled the world's finances, politics, and media. It routinely invented blood libel-like stories about Israelis. It claimed that Zionists collaborated with the Nazis and were complicit in the Holocaust; that they incited antisemitism and were themselves antisemitic; and that they complained about antisemitism in order to smear the left. It inverted the Holocaust, presenting Israelis as the Nazis. In reinventing these age-old deadly fantasies for the global left, it drew on far-right conspiracy theories, including those disseminated by the Nazis in the Arab states. As we will see in this article, the most important ideologues of this campaign personally held antisemitic views.

The adoption of these tropes by the left began in the 1970s. Michael Billig, a scholar of conspiracy theory, observed that in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the British antizionist hard left deployed openly antisemitic tropes and noted that one in particular, which equated Zionism with Nazism, had Soviet origins. In fact, every antizionist trope that he quotes from the British left wing reproduced portions of Soviet conspiratorial antizionist discourse.[12] Another scholar of conspiracy theory, Jovan Byford, notes that in the 1970s and the 1980s, "the far-left in Britain and on the continent viewed Middle Eastern politics almost exclusively through the prism of Soviet antizionism." He classifies this as conspiracy theory, noting that Soviet antizionism motifs persist today both "in the anti-Israel propaganda in the Middle East" and, somewhat sanitized, "in the discourse of a segment of the contemporary liberal and leftist intelligentsia."[13]

Perhaps the most trenchant critique of left-wing antisemitism at the time came from a committed British socialist, Steve Cohen. Cohen was no Zionist. When Israel invaded Lebanon in 1982, he said he sat down to write a condemnation, went "to the left press as source material—and became horrified by what I was reading."[14] In 1984 he published his influential book *That's Funny, You Don't Look Antisemitic*, dissecting his left-wing comrades' conspiratorial antisemitic discourse posing as criticism of Israel. Among other things, he referred to a similarity between the British left's antizionist rhetoric and that propagated by the USSR at the time.[15] More recently, Daniel Randall, also a British socialist, has offered a detailed analysis tracing contemporary far-left antisemitic antizionism back to the Soviet antizionist campaigns and has issued an urgent appeal to abandon this legacy.[16]

What is different today compared to the 1970s and the 1980s is that Soviet-style conspiracist antizionism is no longer a fringe, hard-left phenomenon. It is increasingly moving into the mainstream. As the history I discuss below demonstrates, the danger of this development cannot be overestimated. It contains seeds of anti-Jewish discrimination and violence, and

they are bearing fruit. During the May 2021 confrontation between Israel and Hamas, Jews were beaten in the streets of American and European cities to the cheers and encouragement from celebrities whose social media following exceeded the total number of Jews on the planet, while Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Rashida Tlaib, and other stars of progressive politics advanced conspiracy tropes and deadly fantasies on the floor of the US Congress.[17]

In this article, I explore the ideological roots of Soviet-style conspiracist antizionist rhetoric that is taking over the American liberal mainstream. I will look at the background of the people who produced it and the ideology that guided them. I will also look at the mechanisms that the USSR used to transmit its conspiracist antizionism to the global left. Finally, I will examine how that ideology nourished the post-Soviet generation of Russian neo-Nazis, who have grown to be a crucial part of the transnational extremist movement. I will conclude by considering the implications that the contemporary left faces in making itself an heir and standard-bearer of this tradition.

THE PARIS TRIAL

On April 24, 1973, a Paris court indicted forty-three-year-old Robert Legagneux, a senior functionary in the French Communist Party and the Soviet embassy employee in charge of its French-language weekly publication *U.R.S.S.*, "for inciting racial hatred and violence."[18] The problem arose with the publication of an article titled "The School of Obscurantism," originally carried by the Soviet news agency Novosti, in *U.R.S.S.* in September of 1972. Testifying in court, Jacob Kaplan, the Grand Rabbi of France who survived the Nazi occupation and stood against Vichy government's treatment of Jews,[19] stated that the article was "the most violently antisemitic statement published in France since the end of Nazism."

In its content and rhetorical approach, the article was a typical representative of the antizionist smear genre that had blossomed in the USSR in the wake of the Six Day War. It opened by drawing a parallel between the 1948 massacre at Deir Yassin by the paramilitary troops of Irgun and Lehi and the 1968 Song Mi massacre of Vietnamese civilians by the American military—a misleading analogy that did little to explicate and much to anger.[20] It then equated Israel with Nazi Germany by accusing it of treating the Muslim citizens in the "occupied Arab lands of Lebanon, Syria and Jordan" the same way that Nazi Germany had treated Jews—another spurious equation, which is today known as Holocaust inversion. Today, wrote M. Zandenberg, the author of the piece, it was the Jews who were throwing Arabs "into ghettos, behind the barbed wire of concentration camps."

How did "the Zionist state" produce such cold-blooded "mercenaries," Zandenberg asked. He answered: Israeli children are taught from elementary school to say that the only way to treat an Arab is to kill him—an idea that they learn from Jewish holy books. To "prove" his point, he offered a collection of quotes from the books of Jewish legal code—*Shulchan Aruch*, *Orach Chayim*, and *Yoreh De'ah*—which, he said, served as "manuals" for Israeli military's action. These quotes, he claimed, demonstrated that Judaism preached racial superiority of the "God-chosen people" over others and instilled in Jews hate for non-Jews. Israeli soldiers who failed to obey these laws, he claimed, were severely punished.[21]

The article was an obvious case of lies and defamation, and the French International League against Racism and Anti-Semitism (LICRA), the interfaith organization Rencontres entre Chrétiens et Juifs, and the Israeli embassy in Paris protested. In response, the Soviets doubled down. In a piece titled "What Are Zionists Not Satisfied About?," which Novosti circulated internationally in French, English, and Italian, writer Nikolai Rebrov went straight for the conspiracies. "Israeli hierarchies," he wrote, had always tried to conceal the contents of their most important religious books from the rest of the

world. (Only a Soviet writer living in a country where Jewish religious texts were censored—or one who was ignorant about the subject—could hope to convince his readers that a well-known text such as the *Shulchan Aruch* was secret.) The "worshippers of Yahweh" (a mocking Soviet reference to Israelis and religious Jews) deceived the public about their "religious ideology," "hypnotizing" it with propaganda as they tried to humanize Zionism.

To prove that the "racist" religious Jewish concept of chosenness and the supposed resulting desire for world hegemony were what inspired the imaginary Zionist "genocide" against the Arab people, Rebrov added a few "religious" quotes of his own that were similar in spirit to ones in Zandenberg's article. He concluded by saying that Zionists cry about antisemitism and racism, but "they are the ones who put the Arabs in concentration camps, reservations and ghettos to protect 'the purity of the Jewish race.'"[22]

There is no room in this article to analyze the tropes used in the two pieces in their entirety. Many—from the false, misleading, and demonizing analogies to the easily identifiable elements of classic antisemitic conspiracy theory—are a staple of contemporary left-wing discourse. They have been debunked by others in our own time. The point is that the articles provided enough material for LICRA and Rencontres to sue for racial defamation and incitement to discrimination, hatred, or racial violence. Since the Soviet embassy enjoyed diplomatic immunity, the plaintiffs sued Legagneux, who oversaw the publication of the *U.R.S.S.* Only the first article, which was published by a French-language magazine domiciled in France, figured in the proceedings.

The trial attracted considerable media attention. The plaintiffs drew on an illustrious group of witnesses, including the aforementioned Grand Rabbi of France and René Cassin, a Nobel Peace Prize-winning French jurist who had been a driving force behind the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.[23]

But the high point of the trial came when Grigory Svirsky, a Soviet writer living in Israel, testified about the source of Zandenberg's article. It turned out that Zandenberg borrowed entire passages—typos included—from a 1906 pamphlet called *The Jewish Question . . . or the Impossibility of Granting Full Rights to Jews,* authored by S. Rossov, a member of the ultra-nationalist, antisemitic Black Hundreds movement, which incited pogroms in pre-revolutionary Russia.[24] The only difference between "The School of Obscurantism" and the 1906 pamphlet was that whenever the former used the word "Jew," the latter used the word "Zionist."[25]

Rossov's source of supposed religious quotes in his pamphlet is important. He had lifted them from translations by Alexei Shmakov—one of the most prominent Russian Black Hundredists who dedicated his life to unmasking the Jewish conspiracy that he believed was strangling Russia. A lawyer by training, Shmakov defended pogromists in court and appeared as a private prosecutor in the notorious 1913 Mendel Beilis blood libel trial. (When Beilis was acquitted, Shmakov reportedly exclaimed: "All is lost; a terrible blow for Russia."[26]) Shmakov believed that the source of Jewish iniquity lay in "secret" Jewish texts and took the trouble of "translating" them himself, not only twisting the original Hebrew but adding entire paragraphs of his own in the process.[27]

Nothing could be more embarrassing for the Soviet Union, which positioned itself as the vanguard of the global struggle against racism, than to be caught spreading right-wing, racist, antisemitic propaganda in Europe. Evidently recognizing that it had no case, and wishing for it all to go away, the defense called no witnesses. Legagneux's attempt to argue that the article constituted a criticism of Israel did not impress the court.[28] However, his testimony helped lift the curtain over the process that Moscow used to deliver its anti-Israel rants to Europe. Legagneux testified that, although he was in charge of the bulletin, he had no say over its

contents; Moscow sent the articles to him in French for automatic inclusion. The bulletin was sent to other embassies, and news organizations had explicit permission to reprint its contents.

Recognizing that Legagneux was but a cog in the Soviet propaganda machine, the court ordered him to pay a symbolic sum and to publicize the verdict in the next issue of *U.R.S.S.* ("in the same place and in the same type as the incriminating article") and in six French newspapers selected by the plaintiff.[29]

THE PEOPLE BEHIND THE PROPAGANDA

The presence of the reactionary Black Hundreds propaganda in the article that triggered the Paris trial and in the one that sought to defend it was hardly an exception. In the early 1980s, Ruth Okuneva, the Soviet historian and educator, sent a letter to Leonid Brezhnev, the general secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, expressing concern with the proliferation of antisemitic tropes in Soviet publications. She supplemented her letter with several pages of what she called "strange analogies." Placed next to some 200 quotes from Soviet antizionist bestsellers in these pages were strikingly similar-sounding quotes from Hitler, Himmler, Goebbels, and prominent Black Hundredists.[30]

The similarity was shocking and, as Okuneva pointed out, entirely out of line with the Leninist legacy that the Soviet Union overtly claimed. Lenin had condemned the racist antisemitism of the Black Hundreds, viewing it as a tool of class oppression. In his view, there was no room for such rhetoric in the socialist state. How did such antisemitic language find its way into mainstream Soviet publications sixty-five years after the revolution? The general secretary didn't respond to Okuneva's letter. But we can venture an answer today. In order to do that, we need to look at some of the individuals who were part of the group that produced this kind of literature—the Zionologists.

The Zionologists

The men and women who produced most of Soviet antizionist propaganda were part of a loose Great Russian nationalist movement, which arose in the late 1950s and gained strength in the 1960s. It was called the Russian Party, even though it never became an actual political party. In a sense, the movement arose out of the same brooding atmosphere of the post-Stalin USSR that gave birth to the liberal dissident movement. But instead of looking to Western liberal democracy for answers, members of the Russian Party looked to the extreme right and Russia's pre-revolutionary past. There they found a rich inventory of antisemitic screeds that matched their own hard-core antisemitism.

Some members of the movement could not conceal their hatred for the Soviet regime and ended up in the same labor camps as their liberal counterparts. But many learned to marry their ultranationalist, antisemitic, and xenophobic views to the system's Marxist-Leninist language, gaining considerable influence among Soviet communist elites, the security apparatus, and sections of the media and publishing industry.[31] In the 1960s, the officially banned *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* circulated freely among the Komsomol elites (the powerful youth division of the Soviet Communist apparatus) where several prominent Zionologists took their start. Members of the Russian Party read White Russian émigrés who popularized the Judeo-Bolshevism myth—the antisemitic fabrication claiming that Jews instigated the 1917 revolution and subjugated Russia, which became central to Nazi propaganda. Some read *Mein Kampf*.

Their "knowledge" about the Jews became highly sought-after in the wake of the Six Day War. The defeat of the Soviet Arab allies at the hands of Israel, which gave Soviet leadership a sense that it was losing ground in the critically important Middle East arena, threw the socialist bloc into a crisis. Israel's victory also gave a powerful boost to the Jewish national movement at home, which, in turn, stimulated the

influential Soviet Jewry movement abroad, thrusting the plight of Soviet Jews into the heart of Cold War politics. The one common denominator in all of these events was Jews. Conditioned by decades of a political culture where conspiracism—including of the antisemitic kind—and paranoia ran wild, the Soviet security and party apparatus were ripe for embracing a notion that a massive Jewish/Zionist international conspiracy was operating against them at home and abroad. It was against this background that the group known as "Zionologists" gained prominence.

The Man behind the Paris Trial Article

One of the most prominent Soviet Zionologists was Yevgeny Yevseyev. It was only decades after the Paris trial concluded that the Russian historian Gennady Kostyrchenko discovered that he, and not a "M. Zandenberg," was the real author of the incriminating article that sparked it.[32] By the time *U.R.S.S.* included his pseudonymous piece in its bulletin in September of 1972, he had already made a name for himself as an author of *Fascism under the Blue Star*,[33] whose obviously antisemitic tropes—including the equation of Zionism with German fascism, which in 1971 still shocked the Western public—attracted opprobrium in the West.

Yevseyev's background is typical of several prominent Zionologists. He had been trained as an "Arabist"—a Middle East specialist with knowledge of Arabic—at prestigious Moscow institutions that groomed a trustworthy cadre for the Soviet foreign policy establishment. Graduating in 1958, he received a plum appointment in the Middle East section of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), and the same year joined the Soviet embassy in Cairo, where he rose from Arabic interpreter to third secretary. Returning to Moscow in 1963, he defended his doctoral dissertation, "Arab Nationalism and Arab Socialism in United Arab Republic's Political Practice." He then left the diplomatic service (some claim that he was dismissed) and joined the Soviet Academy of Sciences—specifically, the Institute of Philosophy, where he reported to Yelena Modrzhinskaya, who headed the department of Scientific Criticism of Anticommunism and was herself an important figure in Soviet Zionology. (Modrzhinskaya's biography included serving as an NKVD intelligence officer under Stalin henchman Lavrenty Beria, being stationed in Soviet intelligence residency in London, and being privy to the intelligence received from the Cambridge Five spy ring.[34] One of her contributions to the late-Soviet antizionist campaign was *The Poison of Zionism*, a slim volume illustrated with *Der Stürmer*-like cartoons.)[35]

Despite switching to the Academy of Sciences, Yevseyev retained high-level connections at the KGB, the Central Committee, and the MFA, as well as important membership in the Soviet-Palestinian Society. Being a nephew of Boris Ponomarev, a powerful chief of the International Department of the CPSU Central Committee, who played a central role in formulating Soviet foreign policy (including Soviet relations with foreign left-wing parties), probably helped him to stay relevant.[36] It is likely because of Yevseyev's high-level connections and notoriety that the KGB classified his name during the Paris trial.[37]

The Institute of Philosophy conferred academic credentials and gave scholarly cover for Yevseyev's antizionist "critique." From this perch, he authored numerous articles demonizing Zionism and promulgating the use of the now-familiar tropes equating Zionism with Nazism, fascism, and racism.[38] He lectured widely to Soviet audiences.[39] In 1973, he delivered a lecture in Arabic titled "Middle East in Zionist and Imperialist Plans" at a Soviet-sponsored conference in Cairo.[40] In 1978 he defended his next-level dissertation "Zionism in the System of Anticommunism." The dissertation became a sensation among Russian nationalists but caused protests on the part of true scholars.[41] Because of the controversy, the dissertation was published in a very small print run of 500 copies. (Brezhnev's son-in-law, deputy minister of internal affairs, arranged for the use

of the ministry's print shop for these purposes.) Some of the copies were sent via the MFA to Soviet embassies.[42] In 1981, his *Fascism under the Blue Star* was republished, with some additions, as *Racism under the Blue Star*.

As the Paris trial incident demonstrates, Yevseyev used Russian pre-revolutionary pogromist literature as a source of information on Jews and Zionists. His background as an Arabist helps explain an additional case of antisemitic plagiarism identified by the writer Emanuel Litvinoff. In 1969, he was found to have borrowed fake statistics about American Jews from a 1957 pamphlet called *America—A Zionist Colony*, which was published in Cairo. Litvinoff notes that in 1957, Egypt's anti-Jewish propaganda was overseen by Johannes van Leers, a Nazi fugitive, who served under Hitler, published for Goebbels, and later converted to Islam. Appointed by Egypt's president Gamal Abdel Nasser to head the Institute for the Study of Zionism in Cairo, he oversaw the creation and dissemination of hundreds of antisemitic publications.[43]

Yevseyev's unpublished personal notes confirmed that his "scholarly" antizionism matched his personal antisemitism. In the notes he complained about what he viewed as a Jewish stranglehold on Soviet state structures, the press, literature, art, medicine, and the legal profession. He was insulted by what he viewed as the "ridiculing" of the Russian people by Soviet Jewish stand-up comics. He suggested that the Soviet "Jewish question" be solved through the following process: introducing discriminatory measures against Jews; letting those Jews who oppose them emigrate; closing emigration completely after two years; and forbidding Jews who chose to stay from communicating with Jews abroad ever again. Those who broke the communication taboo were to be "severely punished."[44]

Milovanov's Club

Yevseyev's background highlights an important link that existed between Soviet Zionologists and the Soviet Middle East foreign policy establishment. As a group, Zionologists coalesced around senior functionary Ivan Milovanov, who was in charge of the Middle East section at the CPSU Central Committee's International Department (which was headed by the aforementioned Ponomarev, Yevseyev's uncle). Milovanov personally signed off on all publications related to 'international Zionism.'[45]

Working directly under Milovanov was Yuri Ivanov, the founding father of Soviet Zionology who oversaw the Central Committee's relationship with Israeli communists. He had an excellent knowledge of English and traveled in the Middle East, including Israel. It was on Milovanov's urging that he wrote, in 1969, *Beware: Zionism!*—the foundational text of Soviet antizionism, which sold some 800,000 copies in the USSR and was translated into at least sixteen languages.[46] (I have personally seen copies of the book in Russian, English, Arabic, French, Ukrainian, Estonian, Slovak, and Polish.)

The book's singular achievement was to fit classic antisemitic conspiracy theory into the only philosophical framework permitted in the USSR—the Marxist-Leninist one—and rewrite it as antizionist critique. "Ivanov managed to supply a strong theoretical foundation for openly criticizing Zionism with the help of Marx's and Lenin's works, which no one could argue against," Vladimir Bolshakov, another prominent Zionologist, recalled in his memoirs. The Marxist-Leninist framework, to be sure, was limiting, but even "the little" that Ivanov did manage to say within it was received as a "true sensation," Bolshakov wrote, likely hinting at the response among his fellow antisemitic Russian nationalists.[47] Ivanov's obsessive focus on Zionists earned him a moniker among his Central Committee's colleagues—"the Soviet Union's main kikologist." The moniker showed that for Soviet apparatchiks, there was no substantive difference between 'kikes' and Zionists.[48]

Another prominent Soviet Zionologist, Valery Yemelyanov, was also part of the Soviet

foreign policy establishment, having served as Khrushchev's advisor on the Middle East. This background, combined with his excellent knowledge of Arabic, helped him acquire high-level contacts in the Arab world, which is where he picked up his "knowledge" about Zionism.[49] As a popular speaker on the Moscow Communist Party lecture circuit in the early 1970s, he gave talks in the style of *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, unmasking the "Judeo-Masonic plot" to take over the world. Yemelyanov's book *De-Zionization*, which reproduced the *Protocols* and included his vision for establishing a Worldwide Antizionist-Antimasonic Front, an organization with observer status at the UN, was serialized in Arabic in the Syrian newspaper *Al-Baath* in 1978–1979.[50] The text found its way to Syria thanks to PLO representatives.[51] Apparently, the book was too overtly antisemitic even for Soviet publishers. The Russian version of the book was printed, it seems, with the help of PLO's Paris-based Free Palestine Press.[52]

In assessing the Zionologists' work, Russian scholar Nikolai Mitrokhin notes that part of their objective was to "justify Soviet pro-Arab and anti-Israel policy" to the Soviet public.[53] Their connections in the Arab world and knowledge of Arabic gave them access to Nazi-influenced Arab antisemitic propaganda, which only confirmed their pre-existing antisemitic beliefs. Kostyrchenko believes that in lobbying the Kremlin to harden its antizionist stance, which they regularly did, they were motivated by the interests of their Arab contacts, going so far as to call them Arab states' "agents of influence."[54]

Whatever domestic and foreign policy dynamics that motivated the massive Soviet anti-Israel propaganda campaign, Zionologists' most important and lasting contribution to global anti-Jewish discourse was to make antisemitic conspiracy theory, typically associated with the far right, not only palatable to the Western hard left but politically useful to it. In the next section, I will discuss some of the ways in which this propaganda reached its global audiences.

REACHING GLOBAL AUDIENCES

The Role of Novosti

The Paris trial illustrated two ways in which Soviet propaganda reached the West: Soviet embassy publications and the powerful international network of the Novosti press agency, also known as the APN.

Novosti was a crucial player in the Soviet foreign propaganda machine. Established with the KGB's help, intelligence officers comprised a significant portion of its editorial staff. It was active in 110 countries and maintained connections with 140 major international and national agencies.[55] Testifying to the significance of the agency, the Novosti chair was a ministerial-level position.

Novosti played a central role in helping strategize and execute the global Soviet antizionist campaign. One of the tools at its disposal was the printing and distribution of pocketsize pamphlets in foreign languages, which delivered Soviet view of Jews and Zionism to foreign audiences. In my personal collection, I have the following English-language Novosti pamphlets, each of which was likely published in numerous other languages as well:

1. *Zionism: An Instrument of Imperialist Reaction. Soviet Opinion on Events in the Middle East and Adventures of International Zionism* (1970)
2. *Anti-Sovietism—Profession of Zionists*, by Vladimir Bolshakov (1971)
3. *Soviet Jews Reject Zionist Protection: Novosti Press Agency Roundtable, Discussion, February 5, 1971* (1971)
4. *Deceived by Zionism* (1971)[56]
5. *The Deceived Testify: Concerning the Plight of Immigrants in Israel* (1971)
6. *Letters from Europe, January-March 1971*, by Aron Vergelis (1971)
7. *Soviet Jews: Fact and Fiction* (year unknown)
8. *Tel Aviv Fails in Africa* (1975)
9. *Israel: The Reality behind the Myth* (1980)

10. *Zionism Counts on Terror*, by Sergey Sedov (1984)
11. *Enemy of Peace and Progress: On the Criminal Policy of Israel's Zionist Regime* (1984)
12. *Washington and Tel Aviv against the Arabs* (1984)
13. *Criminal Alliance of Zionism and Nazism* (1985)
14. *Zionism: Words and Deeds*, by the Antizionist Committee of the Soviet Public Opinion (1987)

A January 27, 1971 memorandum from Novosti chairman Ivan Udaltsov to the CPSU Central Committee offers a peek into Novosti's "continuous efforts" to "counter Zionist propaganda" abroad. Udaltsov reported on Novosti commentators' appearances on foreign TV stations, including in the United Kingdom, where they argued that Soviet Jews enjoyed equal status. In his words, these appearances were covered by international press, including UPI, the *Guardian*, and American Jewish publications.

Udaltsov's explanation of how Novosti worked to "expose the truth" about Zionism is filled with characteristic conspiracist tropes. For example, he reported on the placement in the *New York Times* of an article titled "The Fuehrers and Storm Troopers of Neo-racism," which explored "the spiritual kinship of Zionism and fascism." (More on this below.) Novosti also distributed to foreign audiences materials on "how Zionists, by provoking antisemitism, recruit volunteers for the Israeli army"; on top-level American political circles supposedly providing cover to the Jewish Defense League (JDL), a far-right fringe Jewish group led by Meir Kahane that terrorized Soviet offices and representatives abroad in its campaign for Soviet Jewry; and on Zionists' supposed "subversive activities" during the 1968 Prague Spring, a reform attempt by Czech communists, which Moscow crushed.

Udaltsov's memo also offered a peek into how the Soviets compelled their Jewish citizens to participate in their antizionist campaign. Udaltsov was writing at a critical time, immediately after the trial in Leningrad of a group of young Jewish activists who, frustrated with their inability to receive permission to emigrate, had attempted to hijack an empty airplane to fly abroad.[57] The trial, which resulted in two death sentences, provoked massive protests abroad, forcing authorities to commute the death sentences to fifteen years in prison camps. But the damage had been done, and an international conference on Soviet Jewry was to open in Brussels shortly after, promising more negative press.

To neutralize negative coverage, Novosti planned to send Aron Vergelis—editor-in-chief of the official Soviet Yiddish-language journal *Sovetish heymland* ("Soviet motherland") on a European tour and he was expected to give press conferences at Novosti's Swiss and Belgian bureaus. In parallel, Novosti planned to organize protests against the Brussels conference by Soviet Jews at home, including having them sign a letter of protest to be delivered to European editors; and to hold a press roundtable at *Sovetish heymland* in Moscow on Soviet Jews' equal status. Novosti also planned to deliver propaganda materials to Soviet embassies and Novosti bureaus, including a special film it produced about the status of Soviet Jewry and a series of presentations on the difficult life of "toiling Jews" in the West and "on the failures of Zionist propaganda, which is aimed at inciting antisemitism."

Some of the specific deliverables that Udaltsov reported are easily traceable. Vergelis did appear at a Novosti press conference in Geneva on January 7, 1971[58]—an event that the World Jewish Congress condemned as a staged performance by "a few tame, paid, intimidated and frightened [Soviet] Jews" with the purpose of "cover[ing] up the actions taken by the Soviet authorities against the Jewish population of some 3 million."[59] The press roundtable at *Sovetish heymland*'s Moscow offices also took place, with Vergelis and other usual go-to Jews condemning

Zionism and praising the Soviet Jewish policy. (These events provided source material for the Novosti pamphlet *Soviet Jews Reject Zionist Protection.*)[60]

The placing of a *New York Times* piece on January 23, 1971, was, undoubtedly, the single most important achievement for Udaltsov's reporting period. To the credit of the paper's editors, they changed the bombastic title of the piece to the more anodyne "A Soviet View on Jews," and surrounded it, above and below, with columns by two prominent leaders of the Soviet Jewry movement, William Korey and Morris Abram. The author of the Novosti piece, Spartak Beglov, built the article around the condemnation of Kahane and the JDL. It was a perspective that would have earned him easy agreement from most American Jews—a fact that Soviet propagandists understood well. But the real point of the article was to introduce Soviet "Zionism is Nazism" smears to the *Times*' massive audiences. While ostensibly focused on Kahane, Beglov tagged every American Jew identifying with Israel as a "Zionist fanatic" and member of a fifth column standing in the way of peace between the United States and the USSR.[61]

Soviet Embassies Abroad

Some insights into the role of Soviet embassies in propagating antizionist demonization can be gleaned from correspondence between the long-serving Soviet ambassador to the United States, Anatoly Dobrynin, and his superiors in Moscow.

In a July 7, 1970 memo titled "Some Thoughts on Fighting Hostile, Anti-Soviet and Anti-Socialist-Bloc Activities by American Zionist and Pro-Zionist Circles," Dobrynin provided Moscow with an analysis of Zionists' apparent success at penetrating the American establishment. He attributed the success to several factors: the all-powerful Israel lobby; the "excessive public activity" of more than 300 Jewish organizations; the presence of a large number of Jews in influential positions in American media, business, and AFL-CIO leadership; and support from the Pentagon. Having tapped into several antisemitic tropes at once and confirmed Moscow's belief that a powerful Zionist conspiracy operated against it in Washington, Dobrynin noted that the Zionist element "had struck deep roots in the American soil" and that fighting it successfully required "a unified and carefully coordinated plan."

In February of 1971, Moscow directed Dobrynin to study closely the American Jewish community and American Zionist organizations, paying particular attention to the ways Zionists "manipulated American public opinion" in general and members of Congress in particular. The embassy was to work to undermine Zionist influence among Republicans and Democrats; investigate Zionist connections with the "American monopolistic capital"; and to study financial and industrial enterprises controlled by "Jewish capital." It was the embassy's task to take note of any contradictions among American Jews with regards to the Soviet Union, Israel, and the Nixon administration, and to propose ideas for using these "to discredit and weaken the unity of anti-Soviet Zionist forces."

The embassy was further tasked with demonstrating to the American public that Zionists were hostile to American national interests and undermined the all-important relationship between the two superpowers (a talking point that also appeared in Beglov's *New York Times* article). Dobrynin was to report on any instances of antisemitism in the United States, particularly among the political elites, propose ways to use these in Soviet antizionist propaganda, and work with progressive American Jewish and mainstream press to expose hostile Zionist actions.

Dobrynin responded soon after by reporting on the establishment of a special propaganda council at the embassy tasked with aggravating divisions along the Zionist/Israel line among American Jewry, as well as between Zionists and the non-Jewish population of the United States and other Western countries; raising questions about Zionists' loyalty to Israel; helping deepen

disagreements between American and Israeli governments; and exposing to ordinary Americans "the brazen face of the leaders of the newly-minted Zionist 'higher race' from Tel Aviv."[62]

Dobrynin's correspondence illustrates the degree to which Soviet antizionist ideology had imbibed classic antisemitic conspiracism. Tropes about Jewish disloyalty are here as well, presenting Jews as foreign elements in America who stood in the way of peace. The conspiracy fantasy of an all-powerful Israel lobby is a direct reflection of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, a book that fed Soviet Zionologists' conspiracy theories. Some of the proposed actions, such as sowing discord among American Jews and driving a wedge between Jews and non-Jews in America, sound outright malicious. (Israeli investigative journalist Ronen Bergman reported on a KGB operation attempting to drive a wedge between American Jews and Blacks, as well as a series of other "active measures" seeking to undermine Jewish communities worldwide.[63])

This exchange also illustrates the fact that although Soviet officials seemed to understand that the American Jewish opinion on Israel and Zionism was hardly united (hence Moscow was directing Dobrynin to work with progressive Jews and to deepen divisions within the Jewish community), they nevertheless posited the presence of an "excessive" number of Jews in "influential positions" as an explanation for America's "pro-Zionist" policy, as though every American Jew was a channel of Zionist influence. Soviet antizionist ideology held that mainstream American Jewish organizations were cogs in the streamlined and unified international Zionist machine, unquestioningly obeying the World Zionist Organization and the Jewish Agency. It is a notion that is both absurd to anyone who understands the diversity and independence of American Jewish organizations and indicative of the damaging conspiracism that infected Soviet thinking and that Soviet propaganda was selling worldwide, including to the Western left.

Building an Echo Chamber with the Western Left

Another important channel for delivering the Soviet conspiracist perspective on Zionism to Western audiences was direct engagement with the Western left, often conducted via a special department within CPSU's Central Committee, which handled relations with foreign Communist parties. Moscow first learned that foreign Communists were sensitive to the "Jewish question" after an outcry that followed the revelations of Stalin's secret murder in 1952 of prominent Soviet Jewish cultural figures. Another vociferous protest by foreign comrades came in 1963, when the Ukrainian branch of the Soviet Academy of Sciences published an openly antisemitic book *Judaism without Embellishment*.[64] These events embarrassed Khrushchev and taught him, and other Soviet leaders, that they had to carefully manage Jewish-related issues.

Thus, the Central Committee was alerted in the spring of 1966 that leaders of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) approached the Soviet Embassy in London, requesting help in preparing a statement "on the status of the Jewish population in the USSR." Their appeal was a result of questions raised by Jewish Communists in the wake of a new spate of reports of anti-Jewish discrimination in the USSR. In response, the Soviet ambassador in the United Kingdom was to impart the "correct" perspective on Soviet Jewry to British comrades, and Novosti was to send relevant "informational materials and articles" to be passed on to the CPGB leadership.[65]

The same year, the Central Committee learned that a volume was published in Italy criticizing the Soviet Jewish policy. Aggravating the situation in Moscow's eyes was the fact that a senior Jewish-Italian Communist, Umberto Terracini, had contributed to it. The Politburo of the Italian Communist Party (ICP) met with Soviet embassy representatives to express regret over the incident, while Moscow instructed

Novosti to supply the ICP with propaganda materials on Soviet Jews and a subscription to the *Sovetish heymland*. (One wonders what the Jewish-Italian comrades thought of Moscow gifting them a Yiddish-language journal.) Moscow also proposed sending a member of the journal's editorial board "to appear before a large audience" in Italy.[66]

Moscow also built a strong relationship with the American Communist Party (CPUSA). One example of the two parties' cooperation in the sphere of the "Jewish question" and antizionist propaganda appears in a November 19, 1971 memorandum, which informed the Central Committee that Hyman Lumer, a member of the political committee of CPUSA's National Committee and editor-in-chief of CPUSA's *Political Affairs* theoretical journal, was coming to Moscow to attend a conference on Trotskyism and requested help in preparing "materials for unmasking the Zionist anti-Soviet campaign." Lumer planned to incorporate these materials in a series of articles and a pamphlet intended "for wide distribution within the US." The Central Committee memo proposed that Lumer meet with the usual go-to Soviet Jews who knew how to communicate the Soviet party line to foreigners (the group included the ubiquitous Vergelis of the *Sovetish heymland*.) The material Lumer collected during this trip appeared in his 1973 book *Zionism: Its Role in World Politics*.[67]

Lumer was generally a prolific writer holding a clear Moscow line on Jews and Zionism, while avoiding the themes that were immediately identifiable in the West as antisemitic, such as demonizing Jewish religious literature. Examples of his writings can be found in the pamphlets *"Soviet Antisemitism": A Cold War Myth*[68] and *Zionism: Is It Racist?*[69] Moscow, in turn, republished Lumer's output in at least two Russian-language collected volumes on Zionism, which included contributions by other foreign leftists.[70] These two volumes illustrate the mechanism through which Moscow's ideologues created a global antizionist echo chamber: Lumer and other foreign leftists learned the "correct" position on Zionism, Israel, and Jews from their Soviet handlers and conveyed this position to their own constituencies via home publications. The latter, in turn, were republished in the USSR, where Soviet domestic propaganda could claim that the world's "progressive forces" saw eye to eye with Moscow on Israel and Zionism.

Facilitating the workings of the antizionist echo chamber, undoubtedly, was Moscow's generous financing, whose purpose was to ensure outward unity on all key political questions. For example, between 1958 and 1980, CPUSA received $28 million in subsidies from Moscow. Annual subsidies grew each year after that, to reach $3 million in 1988. (The money was used, among other things, to publish CPUSA's *People's Daily World*.).[71]

Between 1950 and 1990, Moscow provided PCF, the French communist party, with $50 million in direct subsidies. In 1987 and 1988 it also supplied PCF with free newsprint to publish its organ *L'Humanité* and paid the salary and expenses of *L'Humanité*'s Moscow correspondent.[72] It also financed the publication of CPGB's organ the *Morning Star*—until 1974, with direct cash infusions, and after that with daily "bulk orders of copies" from Moscow.[73] The latter was a typical way in which Moscow propped up friendly Western hard-left publications. And since these were the only foreign newspapers and journals accessible to the Soviet reader, the approach helped to build the echo-chamber effect on critical issues.[74] The arrangement was crucial for Western leftist publications: when Moscow abruptly terminated its purchases of the *Morning Star* in 1989 (at the time it was buying 6,000 copies per day), with only a weeks' notice, it caused "huge financial disruption."[75]

That the parties had to toe Moscow's line as a condition of the subsidies is clear from the experience of CPUSA's long-serving General Secretary Gus Hall, whose criticism of Gorbachev's reform led Moscow to drop its financing from $3 million in 1988 to zero in 1989. (In 1989, Moscow still allocated a total of $22 million to seventy-three foreign communist

parties, workers parties, and revolutionary groups.[76]) It helps explain why Italian comrades were so apologetic about the 1966 book on Soviet Jewish policy: with Moscow having allocated $5.7 million to the PCI that year, it was important to assuage the sponsor's concern with a senior Jewish-Italian communist's contribution to an "anti-Soviet" volume.[77]

Two high-profile alumni of that Soviet-devised and Soviet-financed propaganda system continue to influence contemporary left-wing politics, including in the sphere of Zionism and Israel. One is Angela Davis, a member of the CPUSA from 1969 to 1991, who became a star not in small part thanks to Soviet efforts. (According to CIA estimates, in 1971 Moscow devoted some five percent of their propaganda efforts to her.[78]) Davis famously refused to speak for jailed Soviet Jewish activists because they were "Zionist fascists."[79] As the author Scott A. Shay observes, Davis continues to advocate conspiracist antizionist views, which hold Zionism as a universal evil responsible as much for the problems in Gaza as for the problems of policing in Ferguson and Baltimore.[80]

The second figure is Andrew Murray, who served as a Special Political Advisor to Jeremy Corbyn during the years when Corbyn's Labour Party was plagued by a horrific antisemitism scandal in which antisemitism often posed as antizionism. (This scandal eventually brought Corbyn down.) Murray spent thirty-five years in the CPGB starting in 1976, and held an unwavering pro-Soviet position. During those years, he not only wrote for the Soviet-financed *Morning Star*, but in 1986 and 1987 worked directly for Novosti.[81] His Soviet-style, conspiracist antizionist views are well documented.[82]

Both Moscow and the Western parties it financed denied the existence of the financial support. Had it become broadly known, it would have undermined the appearance of solidarity. It might also have caused not a little bit of indignation among increasingly restless Soviet citizens, who would have had difficulty understanding why Moscow spent hundreds of millions of dollars to support the revolutionary fantasies of the Western left while they, who already knew what happens after the revolution, lived in humiliating poverty and unfreedom.

Redefining Zionism

One of the lasting contributions of Soviet antizionist propaganda to the Western left's anti-Israel discourse was to decouple Zionism from its original meaning. It was Soviet propaganda that developed what Steve Cohen, the British socialist and author, called "transcendental" antizionism—an antizionism that "transcends anything done by the Israeli state," which continues to dominate the worldview of parts of contemporary left. This form of antizionism, Cohen argued, could

> easily exist without Israel, without Zion and even without Zionism. . . . Anti-Zionism without Zion has the same transcendental qualities as anti-Semitism without Jews; it has no necessary relationship to anything a real Zionist, or real Jew is doing. It exists in the air quite apart from material reality—except for the reality it creates for itself.[83]

While Soviet officials always claimed that their antizionist position was consistent with that of Lenin, in fact, by the 1960s, they had radically redefined the meaning of Zionism. Scholar Lukasz Hirszowicz demonstrated this by examining the evolution of the definitions of *Zionism* in Soviet encyclopedias and encyclopedic dictionaries between the 1920s to the 1970s.

Hirszowicz observed that early Soviet definitions, while "tendentious and imperfect," could still help the reader grasp the actual meaning of Zionism. The definitions noted that Zionism arose in response to antisemitism and that it held a view (erroneous and harmful, from the Marxist-Leninist perspective) that Jews were a nation. The definitions were "not particularly virulent," nor did they contain references to Zionism as "racist or fascist." Importantly, wrote

Hirszowicz, no one reading the early definitions would have viewed Zionism as "a force of universal significance": the reader would have recognized that it was limited in its relevance to Jews, Palestine, and the Middle East.

By the mid-1960s, this began to change. References to Zionism as a response to antisemitism disappeared, as did the Zionist view of Jews as a nation. Soviet dictionaries now associated Zionism exclusively with the Jewish bourgeoisie, presenting it as inimical to the interests of the working class. Importantly, Zionism acquired a clear international and conspiracist dimension. It was described as a "far-flung system of organizations" connected to "imperialist states" and "monopolistic circles." Zionism's "specific objectives and activities" became "global and regional, precisely in that order," wrote Hirszowicz. The idea of "international Zionism" as a nefarious global network that is hostile to the Soviet Union appeared at this time.

These later entries also began to incorporate demonizing language, describing "international Zionism" as a "shock detachment of imperialism, colonialism and neo-colonialism"; "an essential ally of imperialism in its global struggle against the world liberation movement"; and "the gendarme of imperialism" in the Middle East. In American-Soviet relations, Zionism was said to conduct "subversive activities against the détente"—in other words, being an enemy of peace. Zionism was "extremist in its nationalism, chauvinistic and racist," allying itself with "a whole assortment of reactionary forces, including Nazi Germany and Italy." Zionists were said to employ "terrorist methods and resort to criminal means of gathering funds." It was an ideology that "'progressive Jews' regarded as a 'variety of fascism.'"[84]

This change is hardly surprising: some of the entries were written by the Zionologists who formulated this exact theory of international Zionist conspiracy. The inclusion of these terms in official reference books, however, is significant. Not because they set the trends in public discourse: they didn't. In setting trends, the press was ahead of them by years. But, as Hirszowicz noted, Soviet reference books were massive undertakings organized from the top. They required approval of countless government-appointed scholars, functionaries, and censors. Inclusion of conspiracist and abusive antizionist language in these volumes indicated official approval. So while those wishing to believe that that there was no antisemitism in the USSR might claim, for example, that the antisemitic piece that sparked the Paris trial was a result of individual editorial oversight, they could not make the same claim about an entry in the Big Soviet Encyclopedia.

Antizionism as a Political Tool

The conspiracist, "transcendental" Soviet antizionism was born in response to specific challenges Soviet leadership faced at home and abroad. The Cold War, the intensifying competition in the Middle East, the war for allegiances in the developing world, the growing Jewish national movement at home and the Soviet Jewry movement abroad: these challenges arose nearly simultaneously, demanding urgent solutions and proactive propaganda support.

Conspiracist antizionism proved to be a multipurpose propaganda device capable of addressing all these problems at once. Cleverly constructed, it provided authorities with an opening to deny that it was antisemitic. After all, if one analyzed Soviet propaganda carefully, the only Jews and Jewish institutions it demonized were those that could be classified as hostile to the socialist vision: religious, capitalist, and nationalist. Demonization of political enemies was an integral part of Soviet political culture. If capitalism, nationalism, and religion as a whole were fair game, why couldn't one attack their specific Jewish variants?

The answer, of course, is that demonization of the Jews has such a long history that demonization of *some* Jews immediately thrusts the

door open to demonizing the people as a whole. Moreover, it serves as a dog whistle for antisemites. It is hardly an accident that it was members of the antisemitic right-wing Russian nationalist movement that responded with such zeal to the authorities' need to develop a propagandistic weapon against Zionists and Israel.

Although the Soviets always denied that their propaganda was antisemitic, internally there was an awareness that the problem existed. Within the Academy of Sciences, moderate critics of Zionism protested the Zionologists' output, which they viewed as a profanation of scholarship. In 1976, the Institute of Oriental Studies, a central player in the development and legitimization of Soviet antizionist propaganda, organized an internal conference to tease out the thorny issue of antizionism versus antisemitism. At the conference, the moderate antizionists attacked the extremists. (When one of the radicals stood up to defend her Zionologist colleague by referencing his father's heroic death in World War II, someone in the audience quipped: "Was it the Zionists who killed him?")[85]

Among Soviet leadership, too, there were those who understood that the campaign went against the original internationalist principles articulated by Lenin. A behind-the-scenes tug-of-war developed between conservative supporters of Zionologists in the Party and the security services apparatus and their opponents. With time, some of the Zionologists found themselves losing positions and even had trouble publishing some of their most extreme work. The Central Committee resisted Zionologists' ongoing urging to harden its antizionist propaganda even further, recognizing, and fearing, that it might lead to pogroms.[86] (Zionologists, in turn, explained the authorities' hesitation to implement their advice by blaming the actually and allegedly Jewish wives of several top Kremlin officials who, they were certain, acted as a channel of Zionist influence on their husbands.)

And yet, the Soviet antizionist campaign continued unabated. The reasons for continuing with it would have been complex, but one of them, undoubtedly, was the fact that conspiracist antizionism had simply proven too useful a tool to give up. Antizionism helped Moscow bond both with its Arab allies and the Western hard left of all shades. Having appointed Zionism as a scapegoat for humanity's greatest evils, Soviet propaganda could score points by equating it with racism in African radio broadcasts and with Ukrainian nationalism on Kyiv TV. Mutual satisfaction and good will were guaranteed when Soviet leaders signed joint communiqués with visiting Third World leaders that concluded with the boilerplate condemnations of "imperialism, Zionism, and world reaction."

Conspiratorial antizionism that the left inherited from Soviet propaganda continues to be a highly effective political tool. In her analysis of the conference in Durban, Anne Bayefsky noted the political dimension of antisemitism that was present at the event:

> One and the same states sought to minimize or exclude references to the Holocaust and redefine or ignore antisemitism, as sought to isolate the state of Israel from the global community as a racist practitioner of apartheid and crimes against humanity. . . . Success on the political battlefield was to be accomplished by using the language of human rights to demonize and then dismember the opponent.[87]

Conspiracist antizionist rhetoric helps today's progressives make important political alliances and fundraise. It helps create an illusion of a just cause and generate votes. "Conspiracy theorists are above all propagandists," noted Quassim Cassam, a scholar of conspiracy theory, observing that their theories "tend to be politics-based rather than evidence-based."[88] Like classic antisemitic conspiracy theory, the antizionist conspiracy theory offers simplistic and seductive explanations of world events, offering an illusion of easy clarity where, in fact, none is to be found.

The Far Left Meets the Far Right

The propagandistic, conspiratorial antizionism that is gaining influence among the mainstream left poses real dangers. In his *Confronting Antisemitism on the Left*, Randall, the socialist activist, warns that "the current carriers" of these ideas "entrench conspiracy-theorist modes of thought that will render the left ideologically hindered and ineffectual, including when it comes to fighting rising antisemitism from the far right."[89]

It is an astute observation. But I believe that the situation is even more dire than that. By aligning itself under the banners of conspiracist antizionism, the left is, in fact, legitimizing and empowering the extremist far right. The genealogy of conspiracist antizionism, which goes back to twentieth-century antisemitic conspiracy theory, means that it contains the same seeds of anti-Jewish violence that produced pogroms, which drove four million Jews out of the Russian empire, and the Nazi genocide. From Durban to the anti-Jewish attacks of May 2021 in American and European cities, the relationship between conspiracist demonology of Zionism and the physical danger for Jews is obvious.

Ominously, conspiracist antizionism that the Soviets pushed to the global left also has a record of radicalizing its consumers toward rightwing extremism. Political scientist Andreas Umland tells a disturbing story about a prominent Russian neo-Nazi and admirer of Hitler, Alexander Barkashov. During his 1972–1974 army service, Barkashov became radicalized after undergoing "a specially designed brainwashing procedure," in which Soviet antizionist literature "played a prominent role." The procedure was applied in the expectation that he would be deployed to the Middle East to support Egypt in its war against Israel. It did not happen, but the knowledge he gained during preparation for battle would serve him for the rest of his life. After the army, Barkashov founded a karate club, which became the nucleus of his future Russian neo-Nazi party. To help educate the members, he provided them with Soviet antizionist publications.[90]

Today, books by Soviet Zionologists are being republished by right-wing Russian presses that also peddle antisemitic classics. After the USSR fell apart, some Soviet authors no longer felt the need to conceal their antisemitic views. Others, on the contrary, added an "antizionist" gloss to their books and supplied them with introductions denying that they were antisemitic.[91] The same Soviet antizionist literature whose ideas continue to infect left-wing discourse is being used to educate a new generation of the Russian neo-Nazis. The latter, in turn, are influencing the deadly transnational white nationalist movement. When David Duke, one of the most influential voices in that movement, visited Russia in 2001, he expressed a view that Russia could help solve the "crisis faced by the White World"—among other things, because "Russians have a greater knowledge than Westerners of the power of International Zionism."[92]

It is a fair assumption that Soviet antizionist materials are now circulating among the Western neo-Nazis. For example, I have seen a Soviet film, which the KGB commissioned in 1973 as part of its antizionist campaign and ultimately prohibited because of its obvious antisemitic content, surface on the internet complete with English subtitles and an English-language introduction expressing regret that Soviet authorities hadn't had enough courage to stamp out the evil of the Jewish/Zionist conspiracy that the film depicted. I have also seen Ivanov's *Beware: Zionism!*, obviously retyped from the original English translation and made available in a PDF file on a suspicious-looking, anonymous site.[93] With the increasingly important role that the Russian far right plays in transnational extremism, it is highly likely that the knowledge it picked up from Soviet antizionists has been conveyed to others.[94] It helps explain the warm embrace that the neo-Nazi far right has extended to the conspiracist antizionist far left. For example, Duke has praised both Ilhan Omar and

Jeremy Corbyn for their anti-Israel stance.[95] Steven Cohen described an embarrassing, and telling, 1980 episode, in which the *Socialist Worker*, the organ of the British far-left Socialist Workers Party, published a letter from an organizer for the fascist National Front, because they were incapable of distinguishing his antizionist rant from those of their left-wing comrades.[96]

This history makes clear that those on the far left who embrace and propagate conspiracist antizionism face a massive moral problem. Influential players among it have staked their political future, funding and social capital on ideas that trace their ideological roots to late-Soviet KGB, Stalin, Hitler, and the Russian pogromists. It incorporates the same conspiracist worldview, explanatory logic, and antisemitic motifs that characterize the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* and *Mein Kamp*. These tropes do not lose their antisemitic charge because those espousing them claim that they are not antisemitic, only antizionist.

Like their Soviet predecessors, the most radical portions of the left may be unwilling to give up the immediate, and illusory, political benefits of this deadly philosophy. But the rest of the left doesn't have to follow this fringe. It can disavow this murderous legacy. Political victories won with the help of antisemitism are morally corrupt and not ones that are worth winning. Importantly, abandoning conspiracist antizionism doesn't mean stopping opposition to Israeli government's policies and Zionism. But it does mean committing to the concept of criticism as opposed to demonization. It means learning about the complex reality on the ground in Israel rather than embracing an easy conspiracist explanation. It means choosing to use reality-based arguments rather than those rooted in a conspiracy theory. There isn't a shortage of material that shows the way to do it. All that's required is courage and political will.

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